

# 7 trends accountants are embracing

Accountants are reinventing themselves. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this process of renewal, convincing even the most traditional-style accountants that the time to adapt is now and it's more urgent than ever before.



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Bridget du Toit, head of services at EasyBiz Technologies has compiled a list of seven global trends that accountants are talking about.

## 1. Move to the cloud, or move over

Cloud-based accounting solutions have gained enormous momentum in recent months. “The concept of using shared resources, including software that runs on a provider’s server, and being able to access that information in the cloud has made accounting more accessible than ever,” she says.

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown have played a significant role in compelling accountants to embrace the cloud.

The cloud also brings virtual platforms that are useful for accountants such as document scanning applications. For example, Receipt Bank allows receipts to be captured using a smart phone. These are then automatically populated into a business’s accounting system, making the previously onerous task of capturing receipts fast and efficient.

Du Toit points out that the move away from buying and paying for software up-front to paying a monthly fee for cloud services is often resisted by many old-school accountants.

“However, once they fully grasp the advantages of the cloud – saving time and money, as well as the ability to operate virtually from anywhere, any time – they don’t need further convincing. The monthly fee also affords them the flexibility to stop the service at any time, whether it is to go back to their old ways of operating or to switch service providers,” she adds.

One of the greatest money saving advantages of cloud-based accounting is that the data disaster recovery plans of the past have become obsolete. “The cloud backs itself up. Accountants don’t have to worry about paying service providers to back data up for them or maintain their servers. This is especially useful in a country where the threat of load shedding and power surges are a constant worry,” she says.

## **2. Seize outsourcing opportunities**

Outsourcing is a growing trend in the accountant’s world. Instead of employing accountants, businesses are enlisting the services of accountants to take care of certain aspects of their finances – and sometimes their entire financial function.

“This trend is not limited to small and medium enterprises,” says Du Toit. “Large businesses are outsourcing entire accounting departments so that they can focus on their core business.”

This presents a massive opportunity for accountants to use their resources smartly and efficiently, and to charge the customer a monthly retainer fee. Not only does outsourcing give companies access to experienced and qualified accountants, it ensures their services are scalable and consistent.

“Instead of adding someone to the payroll each time they land a large client or introduce a new product, businesses are passing the additional workload onto their accountants. The accountants, in turn, have to scale their businesses. And, of course the best way to do so is via automation.”

## **3. Brush up on data analysis skills**

Information is key today. Google, Facebook and Instagram have prompted the desire for immediate gratification. Instead of simply presenting financials, accountants are now expected to conduct data analysis that allows the customer to make better financial decisions.

“Accountants generate a lot of information, which becomes a crucial component of any business’s decision-making processes. Analysis of information allows businesses to determine whether they have too many or too few employees or whether they are spending too much money on one thing and not another. It helps them to refine processes and become more efficient and productive.”

## **4. Embrace social media**

In the past, accountants relied largely on recommendations and word of mouth to advertise their services. Today, they are realising the benefits of integrating social media into their business models.

“When companies look for accounting services, the first place they look is online. They look for reviews, likes and recommendations on social media – either from their peers or their customers. This is where the interaction is happening. Accountants who save money by moving to the cloud should consider spending those savings on implementing a comprehensive social media plan,” says Du Toit.

## 5. Keep abreast of accounting standards

Accounting standards are constantly being developed, revised or refined. Before the advent of social media, digital advertising and shared economies, these changes had a significant impact on accounting professionals, who had to wade through big dossiers or attend lectures to keep up.

Now these updates are posted online, giving accountants immediate access to information, peer reviews and related industry insights. Consider the Covid-19 Temporary Employer / Employee Relief Scheme (TERS) Directives – government announced the benefit, which accountants had to then access online and get their heads around while working from home.

## 6. Be proactive, not reactive

“Today there is a growing trend towards proactive accounting. With more accountants expected to play a role in businesses’ decision-making processes, they have to understand the potential implications of any significant business initiatives their customers might want to undertake.

“In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, should the business keep its building or retrench people. What are the possible implications? Increasingly, accountants are expected to give their input, meaning they need to have full insight into the financial data.”

## 7. The new ‘mobile’ accountant

The days of expecting accountants to be at a business’s physical beck and call are long gone. Everything is conducted electronically and all traditional paper-based invoices and receipts are a thing of the past.

Enter ‘mobile’ accountants. They have access to software that helps them work remotely. They are able to service more customers or less customers - but more in-depth - depending on how they want to structure their businesses.

“Some of the accountants we deal with choose to service a niche market. They either take on more customers in their specific niche or they give more attention to less customers in their niche, becoming more entrenched in the day to day running of their businesses. And it’s all done remotely using team sharing and remote collaboration tools,” says Du Toit.

Her advice to accountants is not be scared to reinvent themselves. “I’ll give an example. An accountant who has been with us for a very long time was highly resistant to moving online. He found it scary and overwhelming. When lockdown happened, he finally decided to dip his toes in the ‘online’ water.

“We took him on a journey, helped him get an online accounting qualification and his social media profile up and running. He has voiced his delight at how much easier things are, how the shackles have come off. When I asked him if he would ever go back to his old ways, his response was that he should never have been so fearful in the first place and made the move to online sooner. To me, this proves that if accountants can transcend their fear of the unknown, they will not experience a minute of regret,” she concludes.